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SENSITIVE

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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SUBJECT: UNESCO and WSIS

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During the UNESCO General Conference from October 3 to 21, the majority of UNESCO Member States agreed in a resolution to stress UNESCO's and the International Telecommunications Union's (ITU) "prominent roles" in coordinating the implementation of decisions taken at the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS). USDEL's negotiations on the resolution resulted in the deletion of any mention of Internet governance in UNESCO's post-WSIS plan, and in adding a reference for UNESCO's role to be consistent with WSIS outcomes. A minority, also led by USDEL, expressed concern that WSIS outcomes should be implemented by a number of actors, rather than having UNESCO and the ITU lead, but this view was not widely supported. Another resolution was passed noting that UNESCO's Information for All Program, which is currently chaired by France, is uniquely positioned at UNESCO to contribute to WSIS implementation. NGOs active at UNESCO questioned whether prominent roles for UNESCO and the ITU to implement WSIS directives would be effective in practice. END SUMMARY.

UNESCO's POST WSIS ROLE

2. (SBU) In the resolution, Member States stressed the prominent roles of UNESCO and the ITU in coordination of WSIS Plan of Action implementation, both at the Action Line level, and as needed in any overarching coordination mechanism or process and/or at the United Nations inter-agency level. Language was added to acknowledge the importance of not pre-judging WSIS outcomes, and after contentious debate, the UNESCO Secretariat deleted a reference to Internet governance.

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UNESCO Assistant Director General for Communication and Information, Abdul Waheed Khan stated that Internet governance was not a core interest of UNESCO and was marginal to its mandate.

3. (SBU) As noted above, most countries expressed support for UNESCO to have a leading role in WSIS implementation, in particular stressing UNESCO's and ITU's prominent roles in the coordination and implementation of the WSIS plan of action. Before debate began on this issue, USDEL sought to build support for our language to limit the scope of UNESCO's role. While Australia, Japan, the Nordics, Canada, Mexico, Russia and the Philippines expressed varying degrees of support for our language - both behind the scenes and in their interventions - there was not enough support to change the text on this point in order to narrow the scope. In the end, the language was passed as proposed by the UNESCO Director General. UNESCO Member States therefore endorsed UNESCO's mandate and competence to act as a facilitator for the implementation of 6 of the 15 WSIS Action Lines included in the Plan of Action adopted at the first phase of WSIS in December 2003. These are:

- 1A. Access to information and knowledge;
- 1B. Capacity-building;
- 1C. E-learning and e-science (under ICT Applications);
- 1D. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content;
- 1E. Media;
- 1F. Ethical dimensions of the information society.

WSIS: REVIVING A WEAK UNESCO PROGRAM?

4. (SBU) New Zealand, China, Tunisia and France drafted a resolution considering the unique contribution UNESCO's Information for All Program (IFAP) could make in implementing the WSIS Plan of Action adopted by WSIS in Geneva (2003). The resolution passed. Many Member States noted the importance of bolstering support for this weak and under funded UNESCO program. At the same time, it is worth noting that the IFAP Council is now chaired by France's Daniel Malbert, who is the Chief of Mission for the Information Society and UNESCO in the Department of the European and International Affairs,

French Ministry of Culture and Communication. His issues of expertise are cultural diversity and multilingualism vis-a-vis the Internet. His term is from 2004-2007.

15. (SBU) In September 2005, a UNESCO Secretariat source stated that the organization was trying to breathe life into the program and commended Malbert's leadership in the Council. COMMENT: There may be pressure from member-states for IFAP to play a bigger role here. For example, during debate, India called for IFAP to take the leading role at UNESCO in implementing post-WSIS decisions. At the same time, it remains to be seen whether WSIS will give IFAP a new raison d'etre, given its current dependence on a small special fund of member state contributions. END COMMENT.

CAN UNESCO AND THE ITU WORK TOGETHER?

16. (SBU) International Media-watchdog NGO sources note the leading role UNESCO played at WSIS to protect media freedom. They state that greater UNESCO involvement in post-WSIS implementation may be positive, since other UN agencies, particularly the ITU, are less helpful on media freedom. These sources also predict that any cooperation between UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) could be complicated by reportedly long difficult relations between UNESCO DG Matsuura and ITU DG Yoshio Utsumi, who will remain in office through 2006.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: UNESCO has acknowledged the importance of not pre-judging WSIS outcomes and it realized the significance of staying out of the Internet governance debate during General Conference negotiations. That said, there is wide Member state support for UNESCO and the ITU to have leading roles in post-WSIS implementation, and for UNESCO to claim competency in 6 of the 15 WSIS Action Lines. It remains to be seen whether UNESCO will use WSIS to breathe life into withered programs, or whether countries unhappy with WSIS outcomes will use said programs as vehicles for their agendas. Finally, it is not clear that UNESCO and the ITU will play nice once the WSIS dust has settled and coordination of implementation begins. END COMMENT.
Oliver